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December 27, 2005

Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns
Farm Bill - Room 116A
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, DC 20250-3355

Dear Secretary Johanns,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input as you develop USDA's recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill. The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. We are a global organization that works in all 50 states in the United States of America, and in 27 countries, including Canada, Mexico, Australia, and countries throughout the Asia Pacific region, the Caribbean and the Latin Americas. By working with businesses, communities and individuals, the Conservancy pursues non-confrontational, market-based solutions to conservation challenges. We work with willing sellers and donors, protect habitat through gifts, exchanges, conservation easements, management agreements, purchases and management partnerships. The Conservancy currently holds 3.2 million acres under conservation easement, and 1.6 million acres of U.S. lands are subject to conservation easements in which the Conservancy assisted government agencies, conservation organizations or land trusts.

Our comments address your Farm Bill Forum Question #4, "*How can farm policy best achieve conservation and environmental goals?*" The Nature Conservancy recognizes and greatly appreciates the fact that the Farm Bill's conservation and forestry programs are designed to assist rural landowners and work to enhance stewardship across the landscape. With that said the Conservancy feels that the 2007 Farm Bill reauthorization could provide a critical opportunity to build on existing programs and achieve more to both maintain working landscapes and conserve our natural resources by addressing threats to both our natural areas and our working agricultural and forestlands.

The Nature Conservancy makes the following broad recommendations and hopes that you will consider them for your 2007 Farm Bill proposal to Congress:

1. Remove all incentives and maintain existing prohibitions against conversion of wild lands to agriculture. In particular, native grasslands continue to be converted in the Great Plains, in part to capture commodity program benefits.
2. Increase funding for those programs that provide the greatest benefits for biological diversity.
3. Maintain habitat-friendly agriculture and forestry practices on private lands, while increasing the funding available for easement programs on those working lands.

4. Address the threats that invasive species pose to agriculture, forests, and other natural habitats, make preventing the introduction of plants and pests a federal responsibility, and provide additional funding for continued agency work on invasive species.
5. Promote easement programs, practices and restoration activities that improve water quality and flow regimes in watersheds affected by agriculture and forest management.
6. Improve incentives for landowners engaged in long-term adaptive management of both agricultural and forestlands, to promote natural processes for the benefit of native ecosystems.
7. Improve monitoring to ensure compliance with requirements of conservation programs and increase monitoring resources; create stronger links between conservation compliance and eligibility for financial benefits under all farm bill programs.
8. Provide significant assistance to families owning non-industrial forestlands to encourage the use of more effective conservation practices in private forest management.

We thank you for consideration of our recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill, as well as your continued support of the Farm Bill's important conservation programs. We have specific detail for each of our recommendations and would like to work with you and the rest of the department as you develop USDA's proposal.

Sincerely,



Steve McCormick
President and CEO
The Nature Conservancy